

# Porcelain and Piety: The Persianisation of Chinese Ceramics at the Ardebil Sufi Shrine

PAULA SWART

Photographs courtesy of the author unless stated otherwise

IF OBJECTS could speak about the people who made them, who transported and traded them, and about the numerous owners who used and valued them, they might provide fascinating insights, that are barely approached by the usual method of combing through historical records and accounts. On the other hand, the consummate craftsmen working at various ceramic workshops in China (the foremost being the imperial kiln site of Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province) could only dream of the variety of far-flung places where the results of their skilled work would be admired and used, often by illustrious and high-ranking people.<sup>1</sup>

Given the large orders from outside China, the Chinese potters must have been aware and, perhaps, proud to know that their products were appreciated and valued in faraway places with names they probably had never heard of or could barely pronounce. Foreign shapes, decorative patterns, techniques and new materials, such as cobalt, had been copied, adopted and absorbed by the potters since the beginnings of the Silk Road. Nevertheless, some new techniques originated in China itself. By the 9th century, ceramic production had evolved to use a special combination of purer clays to create 瓷 (*cí*) or what the West centuries later would call “porcellana”: porcelain. This was valued for its durability, but first and foremost for its white body, transparency and ability to “sing” when struck. High fired greenwares of different hues, the most popular types from the Longquan kiln site in Zhejiang province, were produced on a large scale in the Song dynasty (960–1279). They became sought after export wares, with moulded, incised and appliquéd designs.

One of the legendary collections of Chinese ceramics in the Middle East was assembled by Shah ‘Abbas (reigned 1588–1629), who subsequently endowed it to the Sufi shrine of Sheikh Safi al-din Ishaq in Ardebil, north-west Iran, some 50 km west of the Caspian Sea and at a distance of 900 km from his new capital, Isfahan (1–4). How and when did these ceramics arrive in Persia (Iran), why did they end up in the Ardebil shrine and, perhaps more importantly, what happened to them and where can we see them now?

Very early on, Chinese ceramics were imported by, and appreciated in, the Middle East, as evidenced by the numerous shards found in archaeological excavations, the earliest of which dates to the 9th century.<sup>2</sup> One of the literary references, testifying to the esteem in which Chinese ceramics were held, can be found in Al-Biruni’s (973–1048), *Kitāb al-jamāhīr fī ma’rifat al-jawāhīr* (*The Sum of Knowledge*

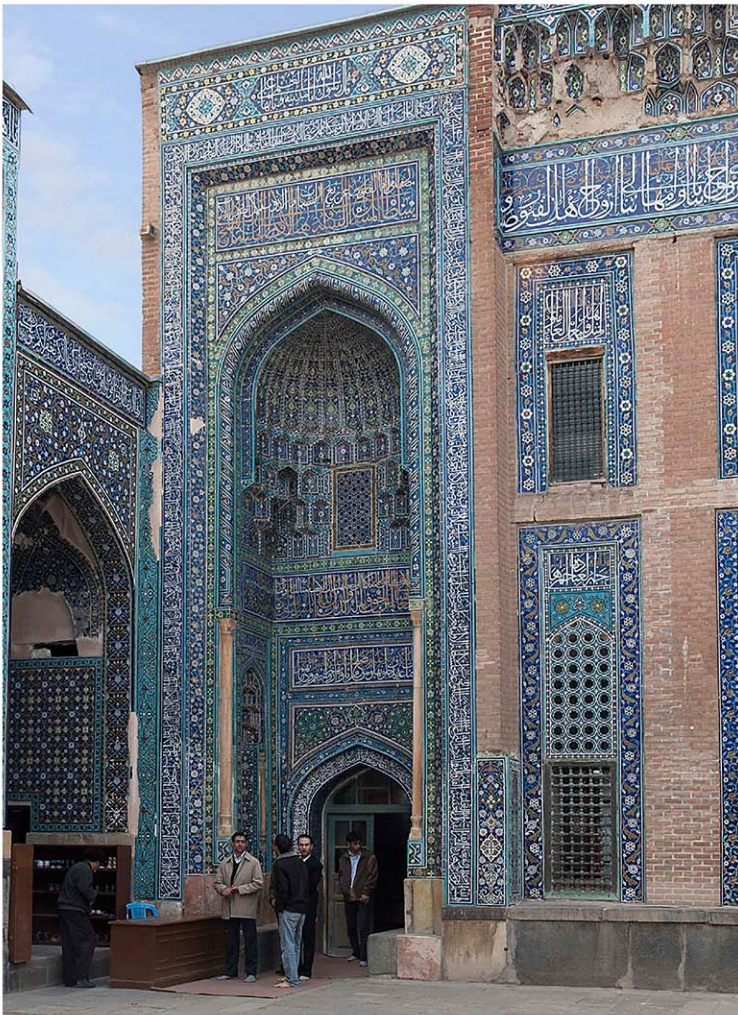


1 Antoin Sevruguin (1851–1933), late 19th–early 20th century gelatin silver print, a group of men in front of the tomb tower of Sheikh Safi al-din with Qibla Qapusi decorated with calligraphy. The Ardebil shrine was originally a Sufi lodge (*khanegah*) and maintained a religious community until the late 19th century. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution

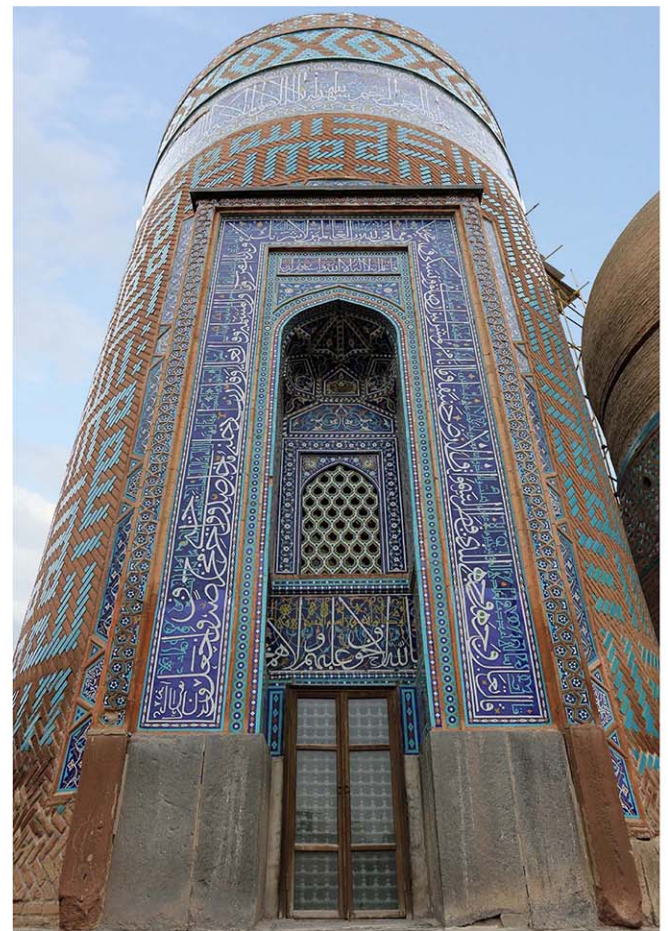
<sup>1</sup>The so-called Gaigneres-Fonthill vase in the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, is regarded as the oldest well-documented Chinese porcelain object to enter Europe. It is a porcelain vase with bluish-white (*qingbai*) glaze, dating to the early 14th century. In 1381, it was given to Charles III, King of Naples (reigned 1382–1386). At this time, it was embellished with silver gilt and enamelled mounts, including a handle and spout that transformed it into an ewer.

<sup>2</sup>The first great work illustrating the existence of a relationship between China and the Middle East was *The Book of Routes and Kingdoms* (كتاب المسالك والممالك, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa l-mamālik*) by the Persian writer, Ibn Khurdadhbīh, published in 846. This work gave systematic descriptions of China, providing details about port cities.

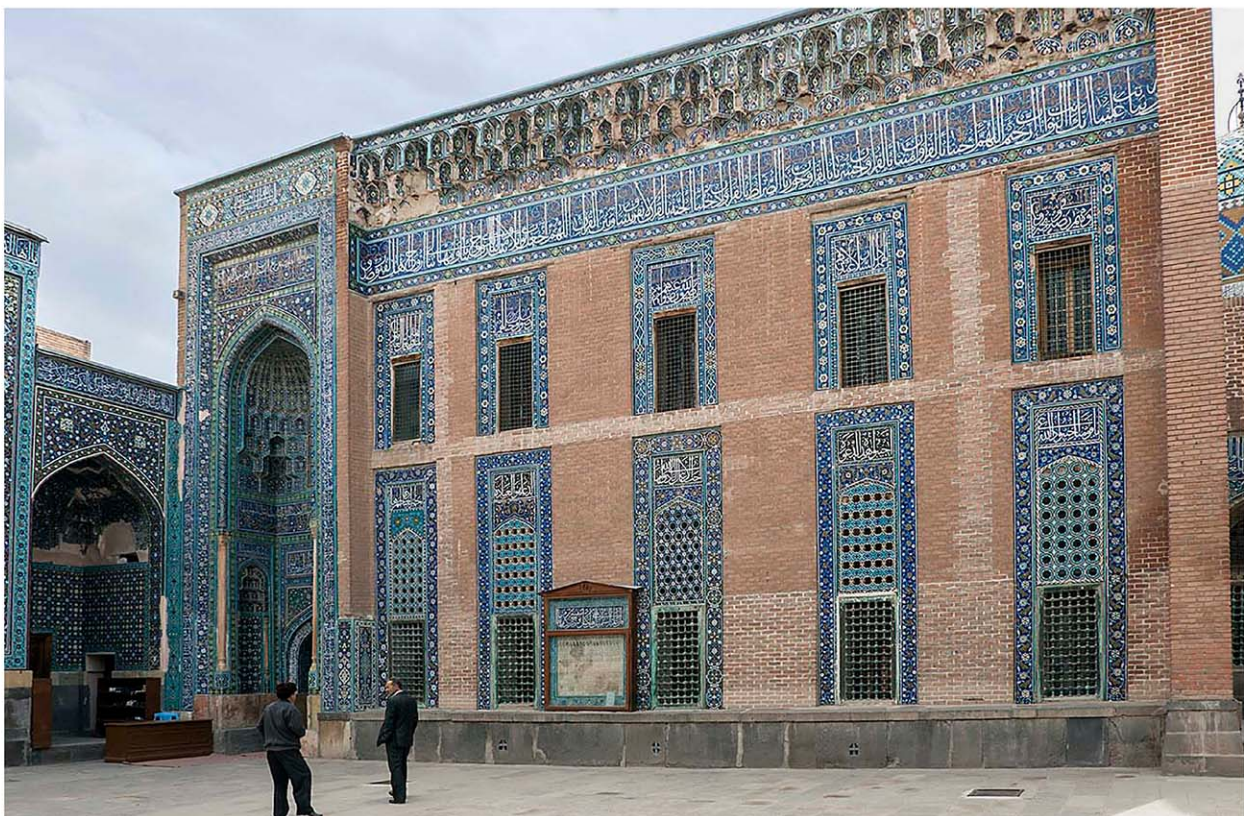




2 Entrance portal with large *pishtaq*, decorated with calligraphy bands, glazed tilework and geometric designs, of Dar al-Huffaz, house of recitation, in north-east corner of the main courtyard, Ardebil shrine complex. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh



3 Ardebil shrine tomb tower of Sheikh Safi al-din, the Qibla Qapusi decorated with calligraphy bands, glazed tilework and geometric design, the colour blue is the symbol of faith, indicative of the invisible world, it is a sign of wisdom, and is the colour of the sky, 14th century, circumference 22 m, height 17.5 m. Courtesy of Richard Stone, 2013



4 Ardebil shrine complex courtyard and façade of Dar al-Huffaz, house of recitation, built after Sheikh Safi's death at the end of the 14th century by his son or grandson. Length 11.5 m, width 6 m. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh





- 5 Interior of bowl with a series of concentric decorative bands: a border of seventeen lotus panels inside the rim frames for floral sprays, including lotus, chrysanthemum and peony; below this a scrolling band showing three peonies, three chrysanthemums, a lotus and a clematis (?); a four-pointed cloud collar design at centre is surrounded by a band with peacock and peahen among peony scrolls. This bowl is a magnificent example of the “white on blue” effect, requiring a large quantity of imported cobalt, Yuan, 14th century, height 18.5 cm, diameter 37 cm. Pope, pl. 23, #29.319, National Museum of Iran



- 6 Exterior of bowl with wave rim, a broad band of white peonies against a blue ground, a classic scroll band and lotus-petal panels with alternate chrysanthemum and blackberry-lily blossoms amid foliage around the 8 cm high foot rim. Yuan, 14th century. Pope, pl. 23, #29.319, National Museum of Iran

about *Precious Stones*). The Persian polymath described the methods the Chinese used in preparing the clay and glazing the wares. He mentioned that the ceramics were imported from Yangzhou, one of China’s port cities, which had accepted resident Muslim traders from at least as early as the Tang dynasty (618–907).<sup>3</sup>

During the 14th century, the Mongols ruled most of Asia and the Middle East, including Persia, which was part of the Ilkhanate (1256–1335) founded by Hulegu, a grandson of Genghis Khan. Its centre of power was in Tabriz. The largest khanate was in the east, where Kublai Khan founded the Yuan dynasty in 1271. The Pax Mongolica during this period facilitated the movement of people and commodities, creating an environment of cultural exchange and artistic innovation. This, together with political stability, provided favourable conditions for the development and flowering of blue and white porcelain at Jingdezhen, reflecting new tastes, including shapes and patterns inspired by other crafts such as metalwork and textiles.

One particular imported commodity—cobalt ore from Persia (probably from Kashan)—arrived in large amounts and was used to create stunningly decorated blue and white porcelain, with tightly composed designs, often arranged in bands (5, 6). Many pieces were of an imposing size, and some of these found their way by various routes to Persia, possibly as diplomatic gifts or as part of trade relations with the Mongol court in Khanbaliq (City of the Khan) or Dadu (大都), the great capital, that is now Beijing. Furthermore, the shapes of flasks and sizes of serving dishes produced in China began to reflect Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian influence, taste and preferences, clearly demonstrating a trend to cater to the non-Chinese consumer. It seems that maritime trade played a major role in transporting large quantities of ceramics from China to the Middle East, as witnessed by the recent discovery of Arab dhow shipwrecks from the 9th century.<sup>4</sup> This was particularly true in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), where this method of trade was first stimulated during the Yongle emperor’s reign (1403–1424) by the legendary maritime expeditions (1405–1433) under Admiral Zheng He, an influential Muslim court eunuch. His fleet reached as far as East Africa, and visited Hormuz, the strategic regional port in the Persian Gulf, several times.<sup>5</sup>

The Safavid empire was founded in 1501 by Sheikh Isma’il bin Haydar (reigned 1501–1524), who declared himself Shahanshah (شاهانشاه) “King of Kings” in Tabriz, thus establishing the first long-lasting Persian empire after the Arab conquest in the 7th century. Shah Isma’il was the charismatic hereditary spiritual leader of the Sufi Safaviyya order (Sufism is a form of Islamic mysticism), originally established by Sheikh Safi (1252–1334), his revered ancestor dating back six generations, whose shrine at Ardebil, 228 km from Tabriz, had become a focal point for pilgrims. His followers remained loyal to his family, who became increasingly powerful.<sup>6</sup>

Shah Isma’il made Shi’ism the state religion and was buried at the shrine near his ancestor. This intertwining of

<sup>3</sup>Zaitun (Quanzhou) in Fujian province was another major port on the south coast of China for foreign—mostly Arab and Persian—traders from the 11th to the 14th century. It has one of the oldest mosques, established in the 11th century, and was visited by Ibn Battuta in 1346. Indirect trade between China and Persia can be confirmed as early as the 2nd century BC by the presence of a silver lobed box from Persia (12.1 cm high) discovered in 1983 in the tomb of the second King of Nan Yue, Zhao Mo (reigned 137–122 BC), at Guangzhou.

<sup>4</sup>The shipwreck of an Arab dhow discovered off the coast of Indonesia’s Belitung Island in 1998, dated to the second quarter of the 9th century, included a cargo of 50,000 Changsha bowls, some with Arabic inscriptions, a few hundred monochrome white and green stoneware, and most importantly, three underglaze blue decorated dishes (from different kilns), the earliest complete blue and white ceramics discovered to date. Remnants of another dhow have been found along the coast of Central Vietnam.

<sup>5</sup>In “Zheng He’s voyages to Hormuz”, *Antiquity*, Vol. 89, no. 344, April 2015, pp. 417–432. Lin Meicun and Ran Zhang establish that the kingdom of Hormuz and Ming China were tied by trade routes. Archaeological evidence revealed Chinese ceramics (Qingbai stoneware, blue and white porcelain, and Longquan celadon) dating between the 14th and the 16th century.

<sup>6</sup>At the battle of Chaldiran in August 1514, the Ottoman army defeated Shah Isma’il, which led to the occupation of Tabriz. According to the Topkapi palace records, sixty-four pieces of Chinese porcelain were taken from his palace, Hasht Behisht, and moved to Istanbul.

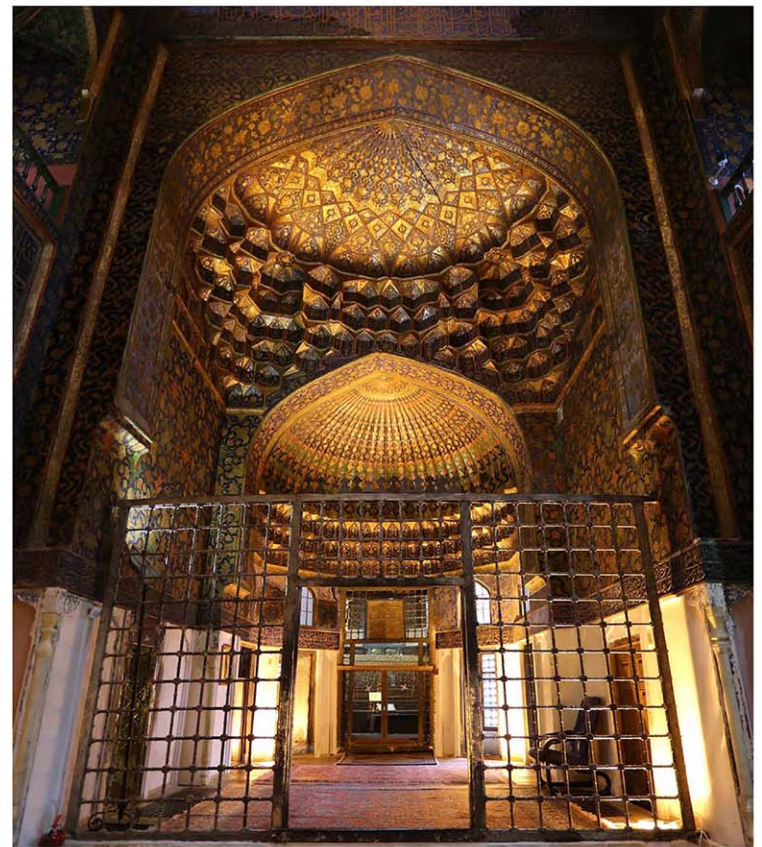




7 Ardebil shrine tomb tower of Sheikh Safi al-din located at the south side of the main courtyard. The name Allah is repeated 132 times in turquoise square kufic calligraphy set against plain bricks using *banna'i* (Persian: builder's technique), 14th century, height 17.5 m. 16th century addition Dar al-Hadith on right. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh



8 In 1526, after Shah Tahmasb ousted the Ottomans from Tabriz, he ordered the installation of the large marble *farman* (royal decree) in nasta'liq calligraphy (1.31 x 1.15 m) on the façade of the Dar al-Huffaz urging the populace of Ardebil to refrain from unlawful activities. Above the stone inscription are the words of the prophet, known as Noah's vessel: "The honourable prophet—peace be upon him—said, 'my family are like the saving vessel of Noah; those who entered it were saved'."



9 Interior of Dar al-Huffaz, renovated by Shah 'Abbas and richly embellished in sapphire blue and gold, the silver grid installed to mark the sacred space in front of the tomb of Sheikh Safi where the shah would pray to his ancestors. Courtesy of Richard Stone, 2013

The Safavid army was able to recapture Tabriz in 1603 and, in late 1605, Shah 'Abbas had his first victory in a pitched battle with the Ottoman army. These military victories probably inspired the shah to display imperial piety and authority by announcing charitable endowments (*waqf*) in 1608.<sup>9</sup> His collection of religious manuscripts went to the shrine in Mashhad. The dynastic shrine of the Safavid shahs in Ardebil was to be the repository of family treasures: his collection of Persian poetry, historical manuscripts, jades, carpets, jewels, gold, silverware and Chinese porcelain from the royal kitchen.

Was this form of endowment unique? Charity is one of the pillars of Islam and public donations to shrines are considered particularly pious. Safavid precedents for bestowing objects to a shrine include, for example, Shah Tahmasb commissioning a lavishly decorated textile, with Qur'an verses written in various calligraphy styles, as a votive offering to Shah Isma'il.<sup>10</sup> Princess Mahin Banu Khanum (1519–1562), Shah Tahmasb's sister, left a collection of exquisite Chinese ceramics to the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad. Sadly, they were looted by Uzbek troops in 1590, demonstrating that porcelain was a highly valued and a most desirable type of booty or gift.<sup>11</sup>

On the occasion of Shah 'Abbas's endowment, prominent spaces of the shrine complex were renovated and richly embellished in sapphire blue and gold, with a silver grid screen installed to demarcate the sacred alcove in front of the actual shrine (9). A 14th century octagonal domed structure was transformed into an elegant, sumptuously decorated hall of chinaware, or *chini-khana* (Farsi: *chini-khane* چینی خانه), the walls having an elaborate *tong-bori* plaster

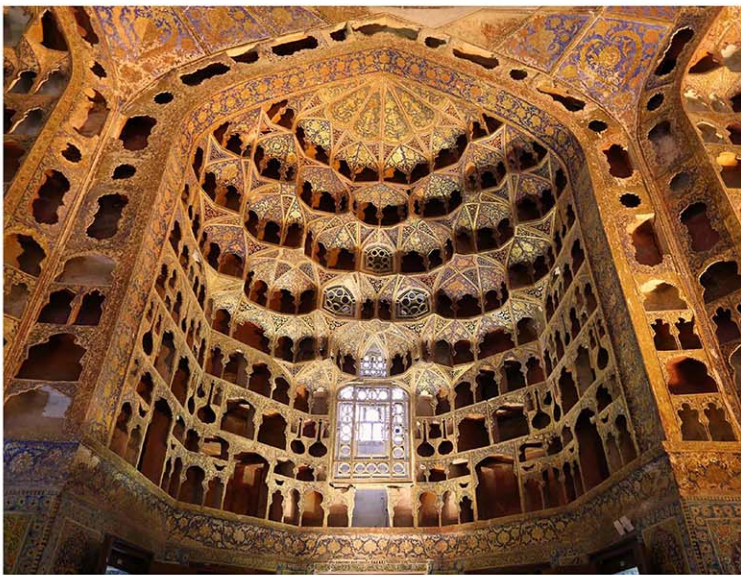
spiritual and political power made the Ardebil shrine a prime locus for endowments by future Safavid shahs, who felt a need to establish and reaffirm their legitimacy to the throne and to show respect for their illustrious ancestors. Over time the original modest Sufi lodge and shrine would expand into an extensive complex, functioning both as a religious and a court setting (7, 8).<sup>7</sup> The famous pair of Ardebil carpets, dated 1539/1540, was made for the shrine when it was enlarged under Shah Tahmasb (reigned 1524–1576) with a large domed chamber called the *Jannat Sara*.

Shah 'Abbas, the fifth Safavid ruler and head of the Safavid order, inherited a diminished empire under attack in the east by the Uzbeks and in the west by the Ottomans. In 1598, he defeated the Uzbeks in the north-east and regained Mashhad, location of the eighth Shi'i Imam Reza shrine.<sup>8</sup> During his battles with the Ottomans, Shah 'Abbas visited the Ardebil shrine to pray for guidance from his ancestor, Sheikh Safi, and held court there several times.





10 Exterior of the large, double domed octagonal brick building, a pre-existing (14th century) structure converted into the repository for Shah 'Abbas's great *waqf* of Chinese porcelain between 1607–1608 and 1611. Once freestanding, it was used for either dervish rituals or a tomb, a crypt with burials exists under the building. The space of the *chini-khana*, measuring 165 sq. m, is connected to the Dar al-Huffaz



11 *Chini-khana* interior, one of the four main *iwan* with elaborate *tong-bori*, a unique system using plaster and wooden shelves to create display niches of varied shapes, sumptuously embellished in gold and blue floral patterns, early 17th century. Courtesy of Richard Stone, 2013



12 Ardebil *chini-khana*, floral motifs, a symbolic representation of paradise in blue and gold on upper part of the *iwan*, early 17th century. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh

design of individually shaped niches (10–12). This space was meant to have a dual function: as a library, but primarily as a showcase for the ceramics, arranged out of reach, in the niches of the gilded walls and alcoves, softly shimmering in diffused light. The eminent lapidary, Mohammad Hossein, engraved each individual piece with a *vaqfnameh*, or dedicatory inscription, as a visual reminder of the shah's piety, similar to placing a seal on a manuscript (13).<sup>12</sup> Through this symbolic act, the Chinese ceramics lost their association with their country of origin and were absorbed into an indigenous religious culture, becoming part of Safavid history. This process of Persianisation was a remarkable example of cultural assimilation.<sup>13</sup>

The endowment, as well as an account of various miracles, was recorded by his court astrologer, Jalal al-din Yazdi

<sup>7</sup>The architectural programme of additions and changes, from the 14th–17th century, illustrate the transformation from a modest Sufi lodge (*khanegah*) and regional pilgrim site to the dynastic mausoleum of the Safavid shahs and its relationship to the cult of kingship. In order to provide financial support for the activities of the shrine, endowments were made of villages, baths and orchards.

<sup>8</sup>The Shrine of Imam Riza contains the tomb of 'Ali ibn Musa al-Riza—the eighth Shi'i Imam, a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad—who died in 818 near Mashhad (in north-east Iran). Imam Riza is the only Shi'i Imam buried in Iran and, therefore, his tomb became an important pilgrimage site, which Shah 'Abbas first visited in 1598, followed by a barefoot pilgrimage in 1601.

<sup>9</sup>In 1605, Shah 'Abbas rebuilt the shrine's kitchen and donated money to the Dar al-marz (hospital); in 1611, he built the royal *sharbat khana* (*sharbat*—a drink prepared from fruits, herbs as well as flower petals), repaired the madrasah and renovated the interiors of the *chini-khana* and Dar al-huffaz (hall of the reciters)—to gain divine benevolence for his grandfather, Shah Tahmasb.

<sup>10</sup>This piece of fabric is decorated in the brush-painted *qalamkar* manner and bears Qur'anic verses in kufic, naskh, thuluth and gharib scripts with indigo, vermilion and golden inks. It was woven by Yusef al-Ghobari on order of Shah Tahmasb as a votive of Shah Isma'il to present it to the tomb of his ancestor at the Sheikh Safi al-din complex at Ardebil. It is currently in the collection of the National Museum of Iran in Tehran.

<sup>11</sup>A large dish with grape pattern dating to the Ming dynasty, Yongle period, circa 1420, from the endowment of Mahin Banu Khanum, was auctioned in 2015 by Sotheby's. In addition to the circular seal from the original endowment, it has an inscription on the foot of the dish, indicating that it was in the possession of the Mughal Shah Jahan (reigned 1628–1658). <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/chinese-works-of-art-n09317/lot.264.html>.

<sup>12</sup>*Vaqfnameh*, or dedicatory inscription, appears today on all but thirty-one of the surviving pieces. The inscription reads: "*Bandeh-ye shah-e wilayat 'Abbas waqf bar astaneh-ye shah Safi namud*", and may be translated as "'Abbas, Slave of the King of Saintliness ('Ali) made endowment (of this) to the threshold of Shah Safi". The term "slave" is used to underscore his humility. Another self-effacing epithet, 'Abbas assumed for himself was "the dog of 'Ali's threshold" (*kalb-e astan-e 'Ali*), which denoted not only devotion to 'Ali, but also to the Safavid state's guarding of the legitimate Shi'i state.

<sup>13</sup>In the various displays of Ardebil Chinese ceramics at the National Museum of Islamic Art and the Azerbaijan Museum in Tabriz, China is not acknowledged as the country of origin. The identification is solely with the Safavid period, regardless of whether the piece in question was produced in an earlier period. Therefore, the term "Persianisation", a sociological process of cultural change in which something becomes "Persianate", is applicable. Only when displayed outside Iran, such as in the exhibition, "Shah 'Abbas The Remaking of Iran", held at the British Museum in 2009, or in the exhibition, "Iran—Bakermat van de beschaving" ("Iran—Cradle of Civilisation"), Drents Museum, Assen, Netherlands, June 17th to November 18th, 2018, the ceramics are identified with China.



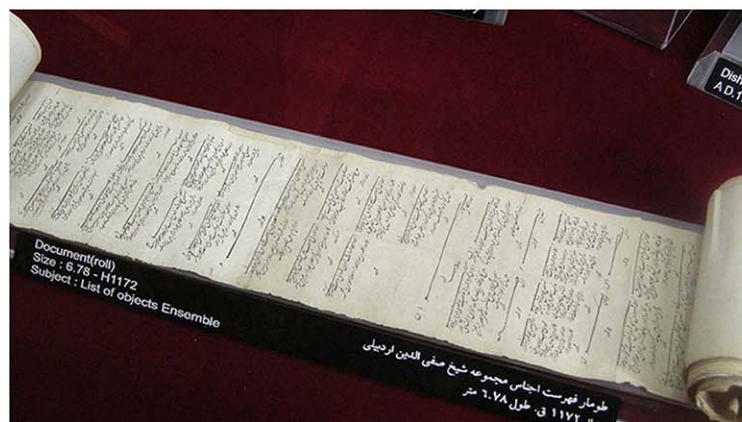
in the chronicle, *Tarikh-i Abbasi*, itemising 1162 objects.<sup>14</sup> It included ceramics from both the Yuan (1271–1368) and Ming dynasties, many of them made well before the founding of the Safavid dynasty, and most of them dating before the reign of Shah ‘Abbas (14). Individual pieces or groups of objects must have been handed down within ruling families in the Greater Persia territory (such as the Timurids, descendants of Timur, who ruled from Herat and Samarkand), and may have served as gifts to deserving high-ranking officials.<sup>15</sup> Some ceramics were probably handed down to Shah ‘Abbas by relatives, while others were presented to him by important and wealthy courtiers as an expression of their devotion and allegiance, or by envoys of contemporary rulers. A late 15th–early 16th century plain white bowl in the Ardebil collection serves as an example of the latter. It was given by the Mughal ruler, Jahangir (reigned 1605–1627), and presented to Shah ‘Abbas by one of the ambassadors from the Mughal court.<sup>16</sup> It is inscribed with the names of both rulers. This is just one example of the time-honoured custom of using treasured Chinese ceramics, admired for their visual beauty, as “diplomatic currency”. We probably should also consider diplomatic gifts from Portugal and Spain during the 16th century. The port of Hormuz, a key transshipment entrepôt between Europe and the Far East, was under Portuguese control from 1515 to 1622. One ewer has a design from a European print.

Only many pieces of the Kraak ware, made during the reign of the Wanli emperor (reigned 1573–1620), were contemporaneous with Shah ‘Abbas (15).<sup>17</sup> In these various ways magnificent collections of precious and beautiful utilitarian wares were assembled over time, converging on Shah ‘Abbas in the late 16th–early 17th century. The large jars, numerous chargers and ewers, etc., were used to serve food during special gatherings.

The earliest glimpse of these ceramics in their new environment was in 1637 in a first-hand account by Adam Olearius (1599–1671), the German scholar and secretary to the ambassadors sent by Frederick, Duke of Holstein, to the King of Persia. Interestingly, while walking through the Ardebil bazaar he noticed two Chinese merchants, who had brought porcelain and lacquerware to sell. Inside the Ardebil shrine, he described the *chini-khana* thus: “In the niches of the vault, there were above three or four hundred vessels of porcelain; some, so large, as that they contained above 40. quarts of liquor. These are only used at the entertainments, which are brought from the Sepulchre, to the King and other great Lords, who pass that way: for the holiness of that place permits not that they should make use of any Gold or Silver. Nay, it is reported of Shich-Sefi (Sheikh Safi), that he, out of an excessive humility, made use only of wooden dishes.”<sup>18</sup> This last remark explains why ceramics, being made of earth, were to be preferred as utensils in this sacred environment, and more appropriate than gold or silver vessels. In order to understand how the shahs entertained important guests at their palace in Isfahan, we can examine the large-scale murals in the Chehel Sotoun Palace (1646), depicting court banquets accompanied by music and dance. It appears that most vessels used for serving food and drinks are metal, perhaps of gold, with only very few blue and white ceramics being used. Apparently, metal vessels were preferred to honour and impress foreign guests in a non-religious environment (16).



13 Dish with flattened rim, faint remains of overglaze decoration in gold, Shah ‘Abbas *vaqfnameh* in red, drilled mark of Qarachaghay on unglazed base, Ming dynasty, 15th century, diameter 34 cm. Pope, pl. 111, #29.691, Azerbaijan Museum, Tabriz



14 Scroll with list of remaining objects, Hijri 1172 or 1793, commissioned by Mohammed Qasem Beyg, custodian of the Ardebil shrine, written by Mullah Muhammad Taher Mostowfi, 757 x 12 cm, Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh



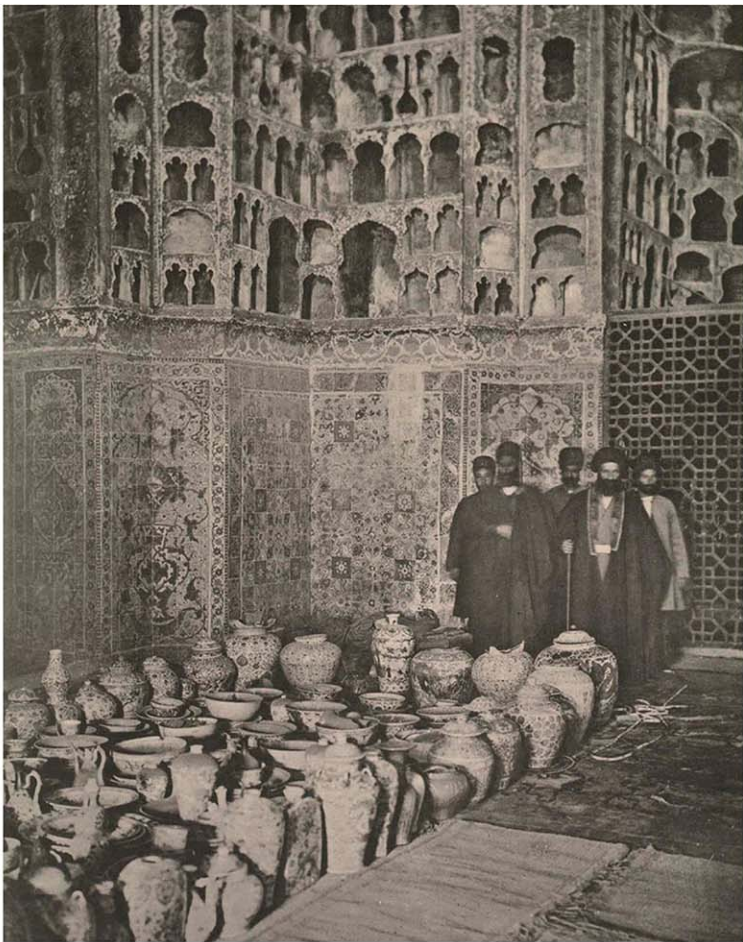
15 Display case with late 16th–early 17th century Kraak ware dishes in front, 14th and 15th century dishes at back; dish front right, height 8 cm, diameter 35 cm. Pope, pl. 101, #29.204, National Museum of Iran

When James Morier (1780–1849), the English diplomat, visited Ardebil on his second trip to Persia in 1810–1816, during the Qajar dynasty (1794–1925), he described a great variety of porcelain, no longer in niches but laid out on the floor. This was confirmed in 1821 by the Scottish writer and artist, James B. Fraser, who observed: “... The niches





16 Mural of banquet scene, Shah 'Abbas and Vali Muhammad Khan, ruler of the Khanate of Bukhara, who is offered sanctuary at the Safavid court; Chehel Sotoun, Audience Hall, Isfahan. The reception scene accurately portrays official and royal gatherings, corroborated by textual descriptions of actual banquets, 1647 or slightly later



17 Interior of Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*, showing a large group of Chinese porcelain assembled on the floor with a mullah and shrine custodians, 1895, Friedrich Sarre (1865–1945), *Denkmäler Persischer Baukunst*, 1901. Many of the large size jars, ewers and *meiping* vases, etc. can be identified today in various museum collections in Iran

which occupy the walls on all sides, and in various figures, produce an effect resembling that of a magnificent fretwork. But the china-ware no longer fills them; in one of the earthquakes to which this district is prone, so many of them were thrown down and destroyed, that the whole were taken from their cells and placed upon the floor,

where they now stand covered with dust” (17).<sup>19</sup> This may explain today’s reduced number of porcelains. Another factor, besides natural “wear and tear”, may have been caused by the Russian army, which sacked Ardebil during the Russo-Persian War of 1826–1828 and removed the precious library of Persian manuscripts, of which 166 entered the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg.<sup>20</sup>

By the late 1920s, an inventory had been made listing 806 pieces of porcelain, which was presented to Mr André Godard, the director general of Iranian Archaeological Services, appointed in 1928 by the authority of Reza Shah. In 1935, the Ardebil collection was transferred to Tehran, and housed in the National Museum of Iran (Muze-ye Irân-e Bâstân ایران باستان). It was here that in 1950, Dr John A. Pope (1906–1982) systematically studied and documented the collection of 805 pieces, resulting in his groundbreaking *Chinese Ceramics from the Ardebil Shrine*, published by the Smithsonian Institution in 1956. Pope was probably the first connoisseur to examine this collection, the majority consisting of blue and white, with eighty plain white, fifty-eight celadons, and a miscellaneous group of polychrome and monochrome wares.

The earliest ceramics from the Ardebil shrine date to the Yuan dynasty and consist of both celadon wares, com-

<sup>14</sup> According to the count of Mullah Jalal al-din Monajjim Yazdi, court astrologer and the author of the *Abbāsi History*, who was an eyewitness to the official dedication of the collection to the shrine in 1610–1611, the endowment included 1221 pieces, but lists only 1162. The *Tarikh-i Abbasi* survives today in several manuscript copies, including three in the British Museum and one in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, all dating from the 17th century.

<sup>15</sup> An early textual mention of a *chini-khana* in Samarkand can be found in the *Baburnama*, written by the first Mughal, Babur. He describes a garden on the Kohak Hill with a four-door portico called “*chini-khana*” because the entire dado was tiled with porcelain brought from China. The Timurid vizier, Mir ‘Ali Shir Nava’i (1441–1501), had a *chini-khana* built in his gardens in Gazurgah (Herat province) to house his porcelain collection.

<sup>16</sup> The second Mughal emperor Humayun spent fifteen years in exile at the Safavid court (1540–1555). During his stay, Shah Tahmasb escorted him on a visit to the ancestral Ardebil shrine. 16th century chronicles comment on this significant moment in Safavid history. Many ambassadors were exchanged to ensure the continuous flow of commerce between the two countries. Mughal ruler Jahangir, curious about Shah ‘Abbas, wanted a visual record of his ambassador’s meeting with him, sent Bishn Das, his leading court artist, to paint the shah and his court.

<sup>17</sup> Kraak ware or Kraak porcelain is a type of Chinese blue and white porcelain produced at the end of the Ming dynasty, from the Wanli reign (1573–1620) to the Chongzhen (1628–1644) period. It was the first Chinese export ware to arrive in Europe in mass quantities, usually identified by a division in panels. The origin of the Dutch term, “Kraak”, is derived from the Portuguese trading ships called carracks, captured in 1602 and 1604 by the Dutch with their cargoes of porcelain. The earliest known written reference to Kraak porcelain dates from 1638.

<sup>18</sup> Olearius, Adam, *The Voyages & Travels of the Ambassadors from the Duke of Holstein, to the Great Duke of Muscovy, and the King of Persia* (*Beschreibung der muscovitischen und persischen Reise*, 1647), translated in English by John Davies of Kidwelly, London, 1662, p. 179.

<sup>19</sup> Iran sits on a major fault line between the Arabian and Eurasian plates; and Ardebil, near Tabriz, is a seismotectonically active region, which has experienced a number of earthquakes, with those in 1721 and 1990 each respectively having a magnitude of 7.7.

<sup>20</sup> Christie’s sale 11961, “Art of the Islamic & Indian Worlds”, London, April 21st, 2016, includes three lots (99–101) bearing the seal impression of the Shah ‘Abbas donation to the Ardebil shrine.





18 Large serving dish with foliate rim decorated with the "white on blue" effect with a border of waves breaking to the right, chrysanthemum scrolls in cavetto, at centre a six-pointed cloud collar with wave border containing flying phoenixes, surrounding a central medallion of six lotus panels framing floral sprays, Yuan dynasty, circa 1330–1350, height 8 cm, diameter 45.5 cm. Pope, pl. 21, #29.48, National Museum of Iran

monly termed "Martaban" in the Middle East, and blue and white wares. A unique group of ten "white on blue" plates, as large as 57.5 cm in diameter, and a large deep bowl, have dense concentric floral designs often including birds, reminiscent of textiles and metal ware, some with additional relief patterns (18). The phoenix is often depicted on these ceramics. In Persian culture, this image would be associated with the mythical bird named *simurgh*, featuring prominently in mythology and in great epic poems of Persian literature, such as Firdowsi's *Shahnameh*.<sup>21</sup>

Dr Pope noticed that none of the 200-odd pieces of 15th century blue and white has a *nianhao*, or reign mark, in spite of the fact that a number of them are of the highest quality.<sup>22</sup> For example, a vase of slender *meiping* shape, the shoulder with stylised lotus-petal panels framing auspicious objects alternating with flames, has a five-clawed dragon in pursuit of a flaming jewel over turbulent waves (19, 20). It is made of the finest white paste in which details of the dragon are incised, only the eyes indicated in cobalt blue. A similar vase was unearthed from the Yongle strata of kiln rejects at Zhushan, Jingdezhen, in 1994 (probably purposely destroyed and buried as the form had slightly sagged, the cobalt pigment was very dark and had run in places, making the design blotchy and blurred). This dragon design and treatment can also be found on a spectacular charger, with a similarly incised dragon with three-clawed feet, as well as on three large bulbous vases (21, 22). Single five-clawed dragons, amid cloud scrolls flying above rocks and waves, are prominently painted in dark blue on five large *guan* jars, most with the six-character Jiajing 嘉靖 mark (1522–1566) (23). However, some of the white wares, and polychrome wares do have Chenghua (成化) (1465–1487) or Hongzhi (弘治) (1488–1505) reign marks (24, 25).

About 30 per cent of the current Ardebil group dates from before the 16th century, passed down within elite families in greater Persian society. It is impossible to ascertain who they were and where they lived, but we do know from Pope's research that various previous owners marked



19 *Meiping* vase with unusual pinched waist decorated on the shoulder with sixteen stylised lotus-petal panels framing auspicious objects, alternating with flames, main design five-clawed dragon in *anhua* technique of incised details, only the eyes painted with cobalt, against a background of white-crested waves, Ming dynasty, Yongle period, height 41.5 cm, diameter 25 cm. Pope, pl. 50, #29.403, Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh



20 Detail of *meiping* with *anhua* decoration of dragon, left, in white against a blue painted background of waves. Pope, pl. 50, #29.403, Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh





21 Bulbous flask, main decoration of a three-clawed dragon reserved in white with incised details, *anhua* "secret" or "veiled" decoration, against a background of blue crested waves, marks of Bihbud and Qarachaghay drilled on the dragon's head, identified with names of two "slaves", *ghulams*, belonging to the cadre of Shah 'Abbas court administrators. Lacking the *vaqfnameh*, therefore, possibly gifted by Qarachaghay, governor of Ardebil (1614–1616), Ming, early 15th century, circa 1403–1435, height 43 cm, diameter 34.5 cm. Pope, pl. 53, #29.471, National Museum of Iran



22 Detail of bulbous vase with three-clawed dragon reserved in white with *anhua* "secret" decoration, a technique very effective in depicting the mysterious character of a legendary creature. Marks of Bihbud and Qarachaghay drilled on the dragon's head. Bihbud Khan Cherkes, a Circassian, was a governor. Qarachaghay received the title *muqarab al-hazrat* ("intimate of the illustrious"), in 1616 the title of khan and appointed commander-in-chief (*sepahsalar-e Iran*) of the Safavid army. Ming, early 15th century, circa 1403–1435. Pope, pl. 53, #29.471, National Museum of Iran



23 *Guan jar*, floral scrolls on the shoulder, the bold main design consists of a single large five-clawed dragon flying above rocks and waves facing a stylised character, *shou* (longevity), a band of formal foliate scrolls near the base (one of a group of five, most having a six-character Jiajing reign mark on the base), Wanli reign mark in horizontal line on the neck, height 53 cm. Pope, pl. 79, #29.514, #29.516, #29.518-20, National Museum of Iran

their pieces with specific drilled patterns. An impressive, large early 15th century charger, the cavetto with sixteen moulded sections, has a central design of a large branch with leaves and three bunches of lychee. The previous owner's mark, "Quli", can perhaps be attributed to Morshed Quli Khan (died 1589), governor of Mashhad and an ambitious Qizilbash chief, who was the regent and guardian of Shah 'Abbas (26). Two pieces have the name "Narinji", who was a poet and military commander, serving under Bahram Mirza, son of Shah Isma'il. The most frequent

<sup>21</sup> In Attār's *Mantiq-al Tayr* (Conference of Birds), and the works of others, such as Qazzālī, Sohrevardī, Shabestari, etc., there are accounts of *simurgh*. Here, it is no longer a symbol of wisdom, cure and health as it was before Islam, but it is the symbol of the perfect man, eternity and the Unity of Allāh in Islamic mysticism.

<sup>22</sup> A reign mark, comprising four or six Chinese characters, is usually found on the base of a work of art commissioned for the emperor or his imperial household. They began to appear regularly at the beginning of the Ming dynasty and are most commonly written in vertical columns.





- 24 Dish with Hongzhi reign mark (found on thirteen objects) and red *vaqfnameh* Farsi version, "*Bandeh-ye shah-e wilayat 'Abbas vaqf bar astaneh-ye shah Safi namud*", "'Abbas, Slave of the King of Saintliness (Imam 'Ali) made endowment (of this) to the threshold of Shah Safi", in a rectangular frame (1.6 x 2 cm), Ming dynasty, 16th century, diameter 21.5 cm. Pope, pl. 115, #29.658-662, Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*



- 26 Rare large barbed-rim dish decorated with stylised waves, in the sixteen moulded sections of the cavetto are identical sprays of roses, the central design of a large leafy branch with three bunches of lychee, exterior fungus scroll border and sixteen fungus sprays (the word "Quli" is engraved on the base), Ming dynasty, early 15th century, Yongle period, height 10 cm, diameter 62.5 cm. Pope, pl. 41, #29.63, Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh



- 25 Detail of Ming dynasty dish with *vaqfnameh*, height 7 cm, diameter 38 cm. Pope, pl. 33, #29.75. *Vaqfnameh*, or dedicatory inscription, appearing on all but thirty-one of the surviving pieces, provides physical evidence of ownership and patronage. The most common in a rectangle (1.6 x 2 cm). They were engraved by Maulana Mohammad Hosein Hakkak-e-Khorasani (the paragon of his age), Azerbaijan Museum, Tabriz



- 27 *Meiping* vase with Qarachaghay mark engraved on shoulder, Yuan dynasty, 1330–1350, height 43 cm, diameter 27 cm. Pope, #29.408, National Museum of Iran, #297

mark is the name "Qarachaghay" (27),<sup>23</sup> which appears on ninety-four pieces, including three 14th century *meiping* vases, but mostly 15th century blue and white, all of the finest quality. They consist mainly of chargers with similar central floral designs of peonies, chrysanthemums, or mixed flowers, and flower bouquets (28–30).<sup>24</sup> This name has been identified with an Armenian Christian convert, who rose to high position during the rule of Shah 'Abbas (31). Being a person of standing, with influence and wealth, would have enabled him to acquire a substantial porcelain collection. His remarkable collection was presented to Shah 'Abbas to express his devotion to the royal house, and thus became part of the endowment.

Qarachaghay's Armenian background is of great interest and may, in part, have influenced his preference of patterns on the chargers. Armenia, known for producing wine, had been part of the Persian Empire throughout its history, as early as the Achaemenid Empire in the 6th century BC.





28 Dish with plain flat rim with fungus scroll, the cavetto has eight peony blossoms on scrolling vine, at centre within an eight-pointed frame drawn in double line, three large chrysanthemum flowers on scrolling stalk with buds, early Ming dynasty, height 7 cm, diameter 38 cm. Pope, pl. 33, #29.75, Azerbaijan Museum, Tabriz



30 Large dish, flat rim with floral design, cavetto decoration of scrolling vine with sixteen lotus blossoms, central design of two peonies on scrolling stalk, early Ming dynasty, height 8 cm, diameter 43.5 cm. Pope, pl. 32, #29.65, Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*



29 Dish with plain rim, interior border of stylised waves above a cavetto decoration of scrolling vine with thirteen blossoms, central design of a bouquet tied with a ribbon (there are thirty-four dishes of this pattern, twenty-three are marked Qarachaghay), Ming dynasty, early 15th century, height 7 cm, diameter 41 cm. Pope, pl. 30, 31, Azerbaijan Museum, Tabriz. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh

The eastern staircase of the Apadana at Persepolis depicts Armenians, carrying metal vessels, presenting tribute (wine) to King Darius (32). A frequently overlooked aspect of the description of “Persian traders” is that the Armenians often figured among these. The Armenians were resourceful with an entrepreneurial reputation, and, therefore, often employed as merchants-cum-envoys. The earliest extant source on Armenian relations with India is an interesting, anonymous early 12th century Armenian itinerary of India and the neighbouring islands of the Malay Archipelago, titled *Names of Cities in the Indies and on the Frontier of Persia*, suggesting familiarity at that early date with India and the Indian

<sup>23</sup>The mark, composed of small drilled holes applied directly to the body, rarely on the glaze, can be read as “Qarachaghay”, a name identified with a late 16th–early 17th century Persian/Armenian statesman (died 1625) serving under Shah ‘Abbas. A Christian Armenian convert from Erivan, enslaved in childhood and brought to the Safavid court to be raised as a *gholam*, or military slave, part of a new cadre of bureaucrats, who attained unprecedented status. In 1605, he distinguished himself in the Safavid army, was appointed governor of Tabriz and all of Azerbaijan (governor of Ardebil from 1617 to 1619). In 1616, the shah conferred the honorary title of “khan” and assigned him commander-in-chief (*sepahsalar-e Iran*) of the army.

<sup>24</sup>One of them has a barely legible forty-three Chinese character inscription on the base. It seems that this was a kind of “sample” plate, with a specific order, or potter’s notes, jotted in ink on the base, including the term “青花” (“*qinghua*”) used for blue and white. Pope, pl. 30, #29.1.





31 This painting, the right side of a double-page composition, depicts courtiers at a reception of Shah 'Abbas I. At upper right, two men stand wearing turbans, distinctive of high-ranking members of court. Qarachaghay Khan (قرچغای خان), identified by name written on the red robe, is the Armenian who held a number of important positions at court and was an important patron of the arts. Safavid period, early 17th century, circa 1620–1625, ink and pigments on paper, image 31 x 19.8 cm. Walters manuscript leaf W.691, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore



32 Detail of relief carving of the Armenian delegation, one of twenty-three subject nations of the Persian Achaemenid empire, bringing tribute to King Darius (reigned 522–486 BC) on the occasion of Nowruz, carrying a beautiful metal wine jug with griffin (*homa*) handles, eastern staircase of the Apadana, Persepolis, late 6th–early 5th century BC

Ocean. Armenians were an integral part of the Silk Road trade, both overland and in the maritime network.

One of the exotic fruits to arrive in Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) China via the Silk Road was the grape (葡萄, *putao*), a word derived from Persian,<sup>25</sup> but it was not until the flourishing international trade and cultural exchange during the Tang dynasty, that wine making in China became widespread. Pope identified as many as eleven Yongle period chargers, with central designs of three bunches of grapes attached to a vine (33). Maybe it is no coincidence that nine of those plates also bear the name of the former Armenian owner. The custom of “the blessing of the grapes”, the first fruits of the harvest, was an ancient ceremony rich in symbolism celebrated by the Armenian church in mid-August, on the day of the Feast of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God.

Like his ancestors, Shah 'Abbas, being aware of their cosmopolitanism and knowledge of foreign languages, appointed Armenian traders as *mihmandars* (official hosts of foreign diplomats and merchants). Evidence of the value he placed on Armenians can be found in the fact that when he realised he could not defend the Armenian city of Julfa from the Ottomans, he decided to force the population to relocate. Most of them ended up in Isfahan, where Shah 'Abbas endowed land across the Zayanderud River to create a new city, which they called New Julfa.

Much of the symbolism and meaning of Chinese characters on the Chinese ceramics would have been lost on foreign owners. Mythical creatures, such as dragons and phoenixes, and animals including lions and horses, are powerful symbols, but have a different meaning in the cultural history of Persia (34, 35). Scenes of deer in landscapes





33 Grape pattern dish with plain rim, wave border and floral scroll cavetto, one of a group of eleven grape pattern dishes, eight bear the mark of Qarachaghay, Ming dynasty, early 15th century, height 7.5 cm, diameter 37.5 cm. Pope, pl. 38, #29.50-54, Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh



35 Large serving dish, classic scroll on rim, lotus scroll in cavetto, decorated at centre with a large carp among aquatic plants such as duckweed, eelgrass, water chestnuts and water ferns, Yuan dynasty, circa 1330–1350, height 8 cm, diameter 45.5 cm. Pope, pl. 11, #29.43, Azerbaijan Museum, Tabriz. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh



34 Ewer with phoenix in four-pointed medallion, Ming dynasty, four-character Xuande (1426–1435) reign mark, late 16th century, height 23 cm, mouth diameter 5.9 cm. Pope, pl. 98, #29.436, Azerbaijan Museum, Tabriz

could be enjoyed without the onlooker being aware of their auspicious connotation of riches and good fortune. Similarly, the depiction of fish, a symbol of abundance in Chinese visual language, could have been admired for its naturalistic detail. Both images occur separately on plates and bowls, but are seen together on a unique bucket-shaped container with handles (36, 37). Highly stylised forms of the character 壽 (*shou*, longevity), including the contorted pine tree version, can be found on a spectacular tall gourd-shaped bottle, *hulu*, joined horizontally in three places (38).

A number of objects have Buddhist symbols, Tibetan script (39, 40) or include Daoist trigrams. Two gourd-shaped flasks (*bianhu*), with loop handles, have on one side a rosette with a *yin-yang* symbol at centre. Perhaps surprisingly there are just two objects with Arabic or Persian writing. A large early 16th century dish, the flattened rim decorated with thirty-two small leafy roundels, has a central quatrefoil medallion containing a prominent inscription in odd Arabic calligraphy, which may be translated as: “Thanks for His Blessings”. It has to be remembered that one of the activities of the shrine, and a basic aspect of hospitality, was the cooking and distribution of food to the poor. It was thought that food from the Ardebil shrine was imbued with *baraka*, or divine benevolence. Shah ‘Abbas reinstituted the beating of royal kettledrums, marking the evening distribution of food, prepared in the shrine kitchens.

<sup>25</sup> Most scholars agree that 葡萄 came into the Chinese language as a transliteration of [bātaga] from Ferghana and/or [bātaka] from Elamite Iranian language. Correspondence with Professor Jan Walls.





36 Unusual bucket-shaped vessel with handles and decorated with deer and fish, Ming dynasty, 1550–1600, height 33.2 cm, diameter 28.3 cm (in the official register is listed a *kavdush*, a term used for a milk container or churn). Pope, pl. 96, #29.481, National Museum of Iran, #8836



37 Detail of bucket-shaped vessel with deer and fish, Ming dynasty, 1550–1600, height 33.2 cm, diameter 28.3 cm. Pope, pl. 96, #29.481, National Museum of Iran, #8836



38 Vase of double gourd shape (*hulu*), decorated all over with four versions of the character *shou*, longevity, in different frames. The pursuit of longevity, one aspect of Daoism, was important during the reign of the Jiajing emperor. A band of stylised lotus panels surrounds the bottom. Body of this vessel is joined horizontally in three places. Ming dynasty, 1522–1608, height 55 cm, diameter 26.6 cm. Pope, pl. 86, #29.477, National Museum of Iran, #4414

Some of the ceramic shapes were novel for the Middle East, such as an elephant or frog-shaped *kendi* water vessel. Other forms were based on Persian metal prototypes, such as the ewer inspired by a Sassanian example with the upright cylindrical body rising from a short straight foot, and a tall cylindrical neck, set to one side with a spout of S-shaped profile (41, 42). Or the pear-shaped ewers set with an elegant curved handle surmounted by an eyelet, the shapely spout secured by a cloud-shaped strut to the body and an ewer with a squat body and tall thick neck (43). The necks are often decorated with upright leaves, the body with various floral scrolls.

Human imagery is rarely found in the Ardebil collection, and occurs on twenty-two, mainly late, 16th century pieces. An exceptional Kraak ware plate depicts a scholar seated under a pine tree, while his servant tends a stove (44, 45). Two *meiping* vases, with cloud collar and six-character Wanli period mark 萬曆 on the shoulder, depict scholars with attendant figures in a landscape setting (46).

Finally, one often comes across the mention of the Topkapi (in Istanbul) and Ardebil collections in the same sen-

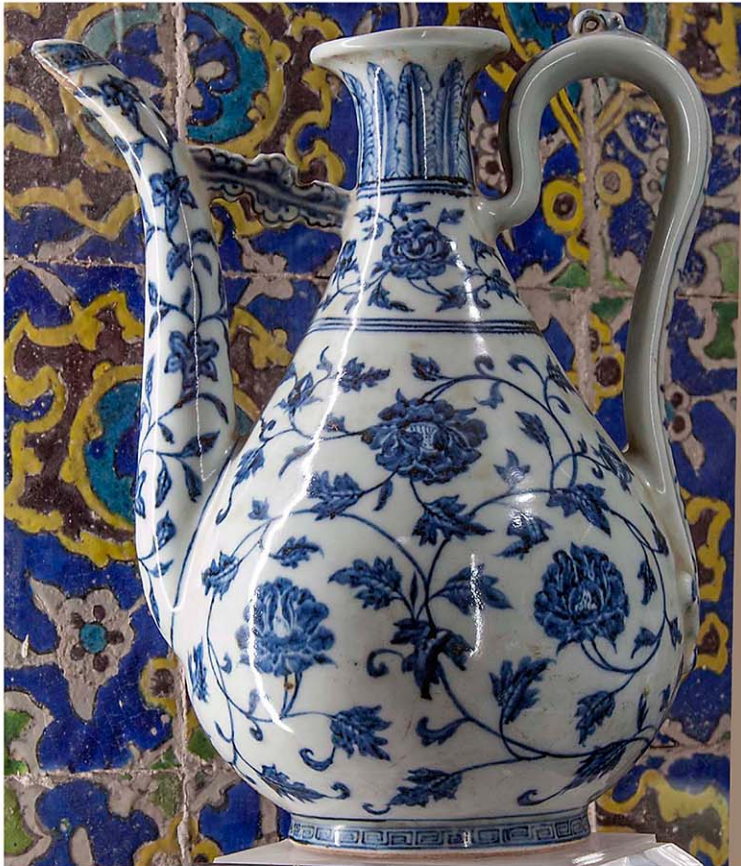


39 Small dish with Sinitic nagari script. The central seed syllable looks like *hriḥ*—the seed syllable of Amitabha. The central mantra is supposed to be *Om ma ni pa dme hūṃ svā hā*, but read either clockwise or anticlockwise the order of words is wrong. The longer surrounding *dhāraṇī* in a sort of funky *devanāgarī*. It gives the impression that the craftsman used foreign letters as decoration. Comments provided by Professor Matthew Kapstein. Ming dynasty, late 15th century?, diameter 18 cm. National Museum of Iran





- 40 Bowl with flaring rim, decorated inside with two rows of *devanāgarī* script, at centre a flaming wheel, exterior has five groups of lotus flowers backed by palm fans amid cloud scrolls, Ming dynasty, late 15th century, height 9.5 cm, diameter 22 cm. The upper row repeats six characters, partly illegible. X - ma - ja - na - va - la. Possibly a craftsman using foreign letters for decoration. Information provided by Associate Professor McComas Taylor. Pope, pl. 66, #29.348, Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh



- 41 Ewer with pear-shaped body based on a Persian metal form, a long spout attached to the body by a cloud-shaped strut and a curved handle with a small loop at the top for the attachment of a cover decorated with a peony scroll around the neck and body, daylilies around the spout and plantain leaves encircling the neck; classic scroll on spout and foot rim, Ming dynasty, Yongle period, early 15th century, height 30 cm, width 23 cm, diameter 18 cm. Pope, pl. 54, #29.428, #29.432, Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh



- 42 Ewer decorated with floral scrolls on the cylindrical neck, a double raised flange lies on the shoulder, the upper part circular, the lower part stellate in form, surrounded by a border of stylised lotus-petal panels, a band of crape myrtle with blackberry-lily blossoms tops the main body of the vessel, which is divided in eight sections, each framing a flower or fungus, a classic scroll band on the foot, Ming dynasty, early 15th century, height 34 cm. Pope, pl. 54, not numbered; and bottle of hexagonal form, the body has a flower spray and one of the "hundred antiques" on each side, the base has a hare mark, late 16th century, height 31 cm, diameter 14 cm. Pope, pl. 109, #29.468, National Museum of Iran

tence, making them sound similar. While it is true that some of the earlier examples of Chinese ceramics can be found in both collections, there are major differences in terms of periods covered and the role they played: the Ardebil shrine endowment by Shah 'Abbas in 1611 provides a clear end date of the collection, in contrast to the Topkapi collection, which besides the period overlap, includes numerous pieces from the 17th–19th centuries, all used or displayed in the palace setting. Furthermore, the Ardebil collection was endowed to show piety and was used within a Sufi shrine setting, while the Topkapi pieces, some embellished with gold and jewels, were used to show off the power and might of the Ottomans.

An excellent selection of representative types, shapes and periods are exhibited at the National Museum of Islamic Art in Tehran, with additional pieces on display in the





- 43 Left: Dish with wave border, the cavetto has a scrolling vine with eleven blossoms including chrysanthemum, lotus and camellia, at centre four main flowers (hibiscus, peony and two camellias), twelve of these dishes are marked Qarachaghay, early 15th century, height 7.5 cm, diameter 40 cm. Pope, pl. 34, #29.88. Right: Pear-shaped ewer decorated on each side with a quadrifoliate cartouche enclosing a fruiting sprig of loquats, surrounded by flowering and leafy scrolls of chrysanthemum, peony, rose and camellia, all below a tapering neck with a band of lotus scroll and upright plantain leaves rising to a flaring mouth, the curved handle decorated with *lingzhi* sprays, surmounted by an eyelet and scrolls on the spout, secured to the body by a cloud-shaped strut, Ming dynasty, Yongle period, height 27 cm, diameter 16 cm. Pope, pl. 54, #29.427 (as displayed in Drents Museum, Assen, The Netherlands, June 17th–November 18th, 2018)



- 44 Kraak ware dish with scalloped rim, the eight panels painted with various flowers and fruit, central design of scholar seated under pine tree, a classic painting theme, "Viewing the Moon under a Pine Tree", which first appeared during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), associated with famous court artist Ma Yuan, Ming dynasty, Wanli period, pre-1608, diameter circa 38 cm, Azerbaijan Museum, Tabriz



- 45 Kraak ware dish, detail of scholar in landscape with attendant, Ming dynasty, Wanli period, Azerbaijan Museum, Tabriz

Azerbaijan Museum in Tabriz (47).<sup>26</sup> In 2010, the universal significance of the Ardebil Sheikh Safi al-din Khanegah Shrine Ensemble was recognised when it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. A selection of various porcelains can be viewed in the *chini-khana* space (48).

<sup>26</sup> Fatima Sarira, Director of the Azerbaijan Museum in Tabriz, told me that only one Ardebil piece is in storage, while twenty-one pieces are on display. At the Ardebil shrine, sixty-seven pieces were on display in October 2018, though not all are from the Shah 'Abbas endowment. Dr Jebrael Nokandeh, General Director of the National Museum of Iran, Tehran, mentioned that eighty-two Ardebil ceramics are on display.

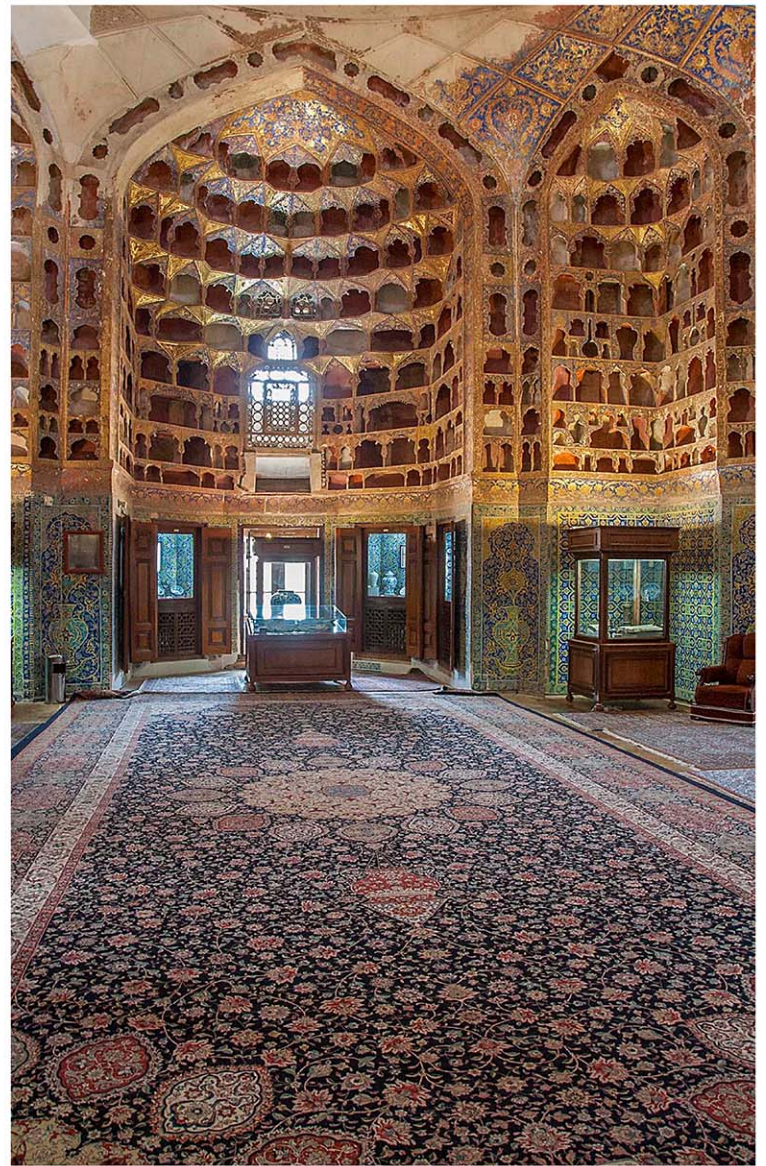




46 Detail of *meiping* vase with scholars and attendants in landscape, Ming dynasty, Wanli period, pre-1608, height 63.7 cm, diameter 30.6 cm. Pope, pl. 86, #29.402, National Museum of Iran, #9299



47 Safavid period Gallery, display of various Ming dynasty blue and white and white wares, National Museum of Iran



48 Ardebil shrine *chini-khana*, view of *tong-bori* niches, display cases and copy of original 16th century Ardebil carpet. Courtesy of Daniel Waugh

## Bibliography

Aslanian, Sebouh, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa*, University of California Press, 2004.

Babaie, Sussan, Kathryn Babayan, Ina Baghdiantz-McCabe, Massumeh Farhad, *Slaves of the Shah: New Elites of Safavid Iran*, I.B. Tauris, 2004.

Canby, Sheila R., *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran*, The British Museum, 2009.

Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, Tehran, 2009.

Sheikh safi al-din Khanegah and Shrine Ensemble in Ardabil, <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1345.pdf>.

Krahl, Regina, *Porcelain Diplomacy*, Chinese Works of Art, Sotheby's February 27th, 2015, <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/porcelain-diplomacy>.

Misugi, Takatoshi, *Chinese Porcelain Collections in the Near East: Topkapi and Ardebil*, Hong Kong University Press, 1981.

Pierson, Stacey, "The Movement of Chinese Ceramics: Appropriation in Global History", *Journal of World History*, Vol. 23, no. 1, March 2012, pp. 9–39.

Pope, John Alexander, *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine*, Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, 1956.

Rizvi, Kishwar, "The Suggestive Portrait of Shah 'Abbas: Prayer and Likeness in the Safavid Shahnama", *Art Bulletin*, Vol. XCIV, no. 2, June 2012.

Rizvi, Kishwar, *The Safavid Dynastic Shrine: Architecture, Religion and Power in Early Modern Iran*, British Institute for Persian Studies, I.B. Tauris, 2011.

*Yuan qinghua / Blue and White of the Yuan*, Capital Museum, Beijing, 2009.

*Paula Swart studied Sinology at the University of Leiden, Chinese history at the University of Nanjing and received a MA in Asian Art History from the University of Amsterdam. She has worked more than thirty years as a curator of Asian Studies in various Canadian museums and lectures on heritage issues and UNESCO world heritage at the UBC Summer Institute in Vancouver.*